

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Public Information Department, 11150 East Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340

PRESS RELEASE

November 11, 1986

THE MAGIC OF STILL LIFE Through February 1, 1987

The beauty of commonplace objects, as perceived by artists and rendered with their own sense of magic and delight, is the subject of an exhibition of twenty-five paintings, prints, and decorative objects from The Cleveland Museum of Art permanent collection. The Magic of Still Life, on view at the Museum through February 1, 1987, shows how Western artists--from 1st-century Roman mural painters to 20th-century Cubists--engaged viewers' senses with studies of objects familiar to domestic settings.

Although still-life compositions--bowls of fruit, baskets of flowers, and arrangements of household objects--are found in Roman frescoes and mosaics, only in the late 16th century did still life emerge as a subject in its own right. From the advent of Christianity until the Renaissance, still-life subjects, often having a religious symbolism, appeared only as decorative motifs in manuscripts or as subsidiary elements in paintings. A 16th-century interest in the precise depiction of forms and their underlying structure--seen in nature studies such as Hans Hoffmann's watercolor and gouache Study of a Dead Blue Jay (1583)--led to the development of the independent still life.

The Dutch artist Ambrosius Bosschaert's depiction of a floral bouquet (1606) and the Spanish painter Juan van der Hamen's Still Life with Sweets (1622)--with their luminous color and meticulous detail--illustrate the almost magical realism achieved by the early still-life painters. Still Life with a Silver Wine Jar and a Reflected Portrait of the Artist (ca. 1655) by Abraham

2-the magic of still life

van Beyeren, exemplifies the love of the wealthy 17th-century Dutch middle class for opulent and expansive settings in still-life paintings. The greatest 18th-century French painter of still life, Jean Siméon Chardin, chose a simpler arrangement and humbler objects in his intimate kitchen scene, Still Life with Herrings (ca. 1738).

Odilon Redon's Vase of Flowers (ca. 1905) represents a modern approach to still-life painting, in which the artist looks to nature as a source for expression, not as something to copy for its own sake. Pablo Picasso's Bottle, Glass, and Fork (1912) offers a Cubist interpretation of these objects, analyzing their structures from different points of view.

Decorative objects, such as a French ceramic box in the form of a bunch of asparagus (ca. 1765), remind Museum visitors that popular still-life subjects also inspired three-dimensional works. A Sèvres porcelain tureen from 1756 is decorated with naturalistically modeled vine handles and a fruit finial as well as painted still lifes on the lid.

Six of the works in the exhibition are reproduced in the Museum's 1987 Calendar, Still Life Impressions, on sale at the Museum's Bookstore for \$4.50.

The Magic of Still Life was organized by Mary Frisk, fellow in the program of art history offered jointly by the Museum and Case Western Reserve University, and supervised by Curator of Paintings Ann Tzeutschler Lurie. Gallery talks will be given at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, December 10, and Sunday, December 14.

#

For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.